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NEW ILLINOIS LAW ALLOWS EARLY VOTING

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, October 2, 2006 – Eligible voters in Illinois can cast a general election ballot beginning October 16 without having to provide a reason or an excuse for wanting to vote early. Election Day is November 7.

Under the new law, early voting begins Monday, October 16, 22 days prior to the election, and concludes on Thursday, November 2, the fifth day prior to the election. So, for the first time in an Illinois general election, voters will be able to go to an early voting site, fill out a ballot application and vote.

Election authorities across the state will identify locations where registered voters can vote early and the times the early voting sites will be open.

Approximately seven percent of the vote cast in the March primary election was cast early, either by absentee ballot or the new early voting designation in effect for the first time in March.

In Illinois elections prior to 2006, voters who wanted to vote early had to request an absentee ballot and offer a reason or an excuse – such as being out of their county of residence on Election Day.

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Absentee voting laws remain in place for the November general election. For example, persons who are physically incapacitated and persons out of the county on Election Day can still cast an absentee vote by mail or in person by providing a reason as required under law.

The new early voting law, Public Act 94-0645, requires that a registered voter show valid photo identification to an election official before voting early. Voters casting an early ballot must display a current driver's license, a state-issued ID card or another government-issued ID with a photograph. The requirement of photo identification for an early voter is stricter than any identification requirement for a person casting a ballot at their polling place on Election Day. The law prohibits a person who voted during the early voting period from voting at the polls on Election Day. The votes cast during the early voting time period will not be counted until after the polls close on Election Day.

Approximately 35 other states allow some form of early voting.

The early voting law is one of a number of changes that will affect Illinois voters this election.

The old punch-card ballots common in most regions of the state in previous elections were replaced in March by new voting equipment, so for the first time in a general election in Illinois a majority of voters will vote on new optical scan or touch-screen equipment. The new voting equipment has been acquired to comply with the implementation of the Help America Vote Act of 2002, federal election reform legislation passed by Congress to improve elections and increase voter participation.

Elections are administered locally by the State's 110 election authorities. These are county clerks in 101 counties, one county election commission and eight municipal election commissions.

The State Board of Elections is an independent state constitutional agency charged with the responsibility of having general supervision over the administration of election laws of the state. For more information, contact election authorities or visit the Board's website www.elections.il.gov.